

CYPRUS – HERITAGE @ RISK!

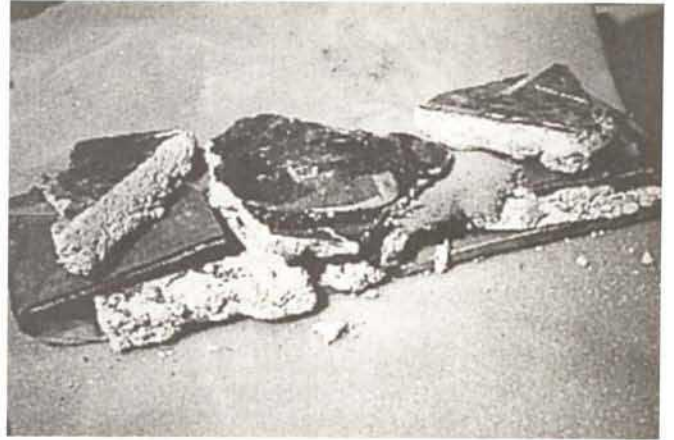
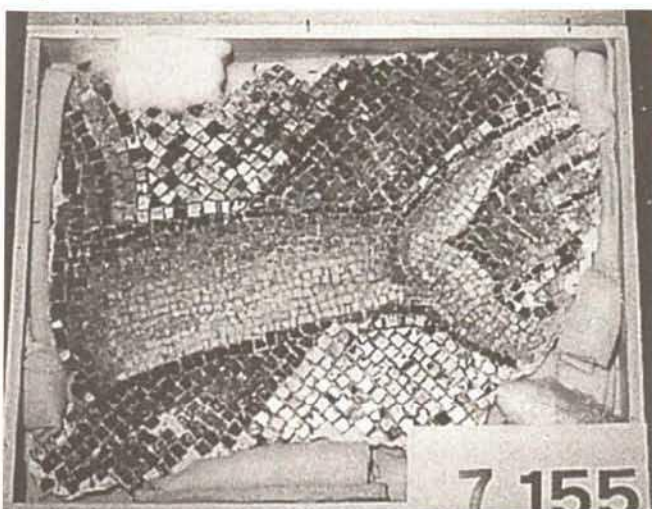
The occupation of Cyprus by Turkish forces in 1974 caused a terrible tragedy to the rich cultural heritage and the cultural identity of northern Cyprus. Not only all Greek names were changed, but all testimonies to the ancient Greek culture were eliminated, churches and monasteries were desecrated, pilaged, destroyed and left to decay. Tombstones were smashed, archaeological sites ravaged, and art objects from heritage places such as countless icons, frescoes and mosaics were taken away to end up in the illicit trade of antiquities. The extent of this sale of cultural heritage in northern Cyprus is shown by the crime story of the art dealer Aydin Dikman who was arrested in Munich in 1997:

Following the occupation of northern Cyprus by Turkish forces in 1974, looters stripped the region's churches, removing an estimated 15,000 to 20,000 icons, several dozens of major frescoes and mosaics dating from the sixth to the fifteenth century, and thousands of chalices, wooden carvings, crucifixes and Bibles. Efforts by the Autocephalous Church of Cyprus and the Republic of Cyprus have resulted in the return of some of these objects, but the majority remain lost. A major breakthrough came this past October, when Munich police arrested 60-year-old Aydin Dikman after he was videotaped selling stolen goods. The arrest was made possible by the co operation of Dikman's former client, Dutch art dealer Michel van Rijn. In apartments rented by Dikman, police found frescoes, mosaics and icons estimated to be worth more than \$40 million. The artworks were taken to the Bavarian National Museum for evaluation, while Dikman was taken to prison.

(Quotation from the report by Mark Rose "From Cyprus to Munich" in *archaeology*, April 20, 1998)

See detailed report by Mark Rose www.archaeology.org/online/features/cyprus/index.html and further press reports on destruction of cultural heritage in northern Cyprus under www.hr-action.org/chr/heritage00.html

Fragment from the Church of the Panagia Kanakariá, seized by the police in Munich



Fragments of a fresco. Many frescoes from the looted churches in Northern Cyprus were badly damaged.

The Holy Door of the Monastery of St Anastassios in Peristerona (Famagusta district), now at Kanazawa College of Arts in Japan

